DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 047 888 RE 003 294

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TITLE Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic--Federal Style, 1970.
PUB DATE 1 Apr 70
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the convention of the National Catholic Educational Association, Atlantic City, N.J., Apr. 1, 1970

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Catholic Schools, *Educational Change, Educational Finance, Educational Innovation, *Educational Needs, *Parochial Schools, Reading Improvement, *Reading Instruction, Reading Programs, Religious Education

ABSTRACT

In a speech before the general convention of the National Catholic Educational Association in April of 1970, then Commissioner of Education Allen spoke of a contemporary look at basic skills and of an emerging dimension of parochial education. Speaking specifically of the "Right to Read" effort, of the current attention to environmental protection, and of the problems of financing programs, Allen argued for the necessity of each. His view of what parochial education might become was based on a quote from Neil McCluskey regarding the increasingly ecumenical, bridging role such schools should have. In conclusion, Allen asked for a careful reevaluation of parochial schools so that obviously needed changes might benefit all educational endeavors. (MS)

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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READING, 'RITING, AND 'RITHMETIC -- FEDERAL STYLE, 1970*

Address by James E. Allen, Jr.
Assistant Secretary for Education
and
U.S. Commissioner of Education

I come to you tonight from our Capital City of Washington which, given this year's budget, might be somewhat ruefully referred to by educators as the "Valley of Dearth."

Although I do not, alas, come bearing gifts, I am pleased to have this opportunity -- my first -- to address this distinguished group of American educators. While my new job is heavily weighted toward the concerns of public education, as the United States Commissioner of Education, my responsibilities include the educational well-being of all children and youth regardless of the school or college they attend.

If anyone had approached you or your predecessors in Catholic Education thirty years ago and told you that by 1970, Jesuits would be studying Theology at Columbia University or that hemlines would be the subject of debate in women's religious communities, you probably would have assured him that he needed a very carefree vacation or a very good physician! Yet, as we look about us in this age of moonshots, 747's and the Mets, change is emerging as a constant, rather than

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*Before General Convention of the National Catholic Educational Association, Shelburne Hotel, Atlantic City, N.J., Wednesday, April 1, 1970, 7:30 p.m.

a variable, in our society. What was accepted and taken for granted ten years ago is no longer unquestioned. The Catholic Church, as much as any other institution, has experienced enormous mutations in its operating procedures. Institutions of all kinds are changing and education is no exception.

To ascertain the nature of the change taking place in education it might be revealing to consider a rather different concept of the traditional three R's -- Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic -- as they might be interpreted, Federal style, 1970.

Reading becomes, of course, the Right to Read effort. One definition of a dreamer could be anyone who expects to hear a speech from me without some mention of this effort. Indeed, the universality of the reading problem and the concern it has generated is illustrated by the fact that there is no speech, no matter what the subject, in which the importance of the Right to Read effort cannot be appropriately included.

When I set forth this idea in a speech before a meeting of the National Association of State Boards of Education in October of last year, I described it as education's moon shot for the 70's, believing that a Nation that could successfully put a man on the moon could

certainly demonstrate the same imagination, tenacity of purpose and dedication in ensuring that all the children in our schools should learn to read.

The goal set was that "by the end of the 1970's no child should be leaving our schools without the ability and the desire to read to the full extent of his capabilities." It is clearly an intolerable, indefensible situation when one out of every four students has some sort of reading deficiency.

I called it the Right to Read because certainly the possession of so fundamental a skill is inherent in the right to education which has from the beginning of our Nation been a basic concept of our idea of democracy.

Now six months later, I am enormously impressed and encouraged by the widespread response to the call for commitment to the Right to Read goal.

The President has from the beginning given his enthusiastic support. Very soon he will be announcing the formation of a National Reading Council. Mrs. Nixon, with her background in teaching, has graciously consented to serve as Honorary Chairman.

The Council will be headed by a Board of Trustees drawn from many segments of our society. It will advise the Office of Education and other Government agencies on priorities in the Right to Read effort. Members of the Council will also assume key roles in directing and operating a National Reading Center.

The National Reading Council will include representatives of the education profession, State and local governments, labor unions, business and industry, the scientific community, the communications media, the foundations, youth groups, minorities, religious organizations, volunteer groups, etc., as well as individuals whose experience in such fields as publishing, public relations, advertising, entertainment and the arts may contribute to the achievement of the program's objectives.

The operating arm of the National Reading Council will be the National Reading Center, which will be established with Federal funds outside the official apparatus of Government agencies. Its primary purpose will be to carry out the partnership approach, coordinating the efforts of contributing organizations, organizing the training of citizen volunteers, developing public support, and helping the States to undertake similar programs.

You will be represented in these activities and I hope that you will give your wholehearted support to the nationwide Right to Read effort. Your support is already being demonstrated in many ways. One example is the project of the Education Progress Center of the Archdiocese of California. This Summer they will conduct a pilot "Right to Read" program for 550 minority group children in the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas. Teachers in the program, who are donating their services as volunteers, will come from among Catholic School Sisters in California with experience in teaching reading to disadvantaged children.

Central to the concept of the Right to Read effort from the beginning has been the role of the private -- the non-professional -- sector of society. This role will take many forms, but the help of the volunteer worker will be essential. The first major step in organizing volunteer participation took place on Monday and Tuesday of this week at a Conference in Washington. A representative group from across the Nation gathered to consider the role of the volunteer, and from their deliberations we have received valuable help on guidelines for a program of volunteer action.

The success of the Right to Read effort depends on the determination and participation not only of Government but of all citizens -- professional educator, parent, volunteer -- everyone. Working together

we can generate an irresistible momentum that will ensure the realization of the goal. With this realization -- the elimination of reading failures -- we will not only guarantee an inalienable educational right but we will also diminish and indeed solve many of the other problems, within our schools and without, that now stand as barriers both to equal educational opportunity and to the equal opportunity of all to share fully in the benefits of our society.

Next we come to the second R, 'Riting -- which at this stage of man's history could be looked upon as the handwriting on the wall about the tragic state of our environment, the perilous condition of our planet -- a situation so potentially disastrous that it should produce a sense of foreboding with every conscious breath we take.

So much attention is being given to our environmental-ecological condition that I am sometimes fearful that the sense of danger may be dulled by the sheer volume of words and warnings -- and that this urgent cause may suffer the sometime fate of popularity that begets a belief of action simply because there is so much being said.

To counteract this it is essential that we quickly develop in both young and old an understanding of the society in which we live -- an increasingly urbanized society with all the problems that this creates.

We need to develop ecological studies designed to make everyone aware of the fragile and interacting relationships of land, air and water, and to give new understandings of the eco-concepts that must govern the development of society, encompassing the demands of increasing urbanization.

Education's responsibility is inescapable. We need in our schools to counteract the idea of environment as being something "out there" that can be visited and then left behind at the end of the field trip. Our goal must be to see that every school has access to an environmental study area where youngsters of all ages can grow up with the concept of environment as being everything that makes up our world, and with an understanding of the interdependency of all its numberless elements.

Emphasizing environmental-ecological studies in American education will help to make every individual more aware of how dependent each of us is upon the other. We shall -- we must -- learn that in the highly complex structure which is human society, survival depends on self-control (which includes control of technology -- that mammoth extension of "self.")

The simple goal of all this educational effort is the realization that the acts of one react on all. If we can learn this lesson, we shall

live in a better society. If we do not learn it, we may well have no society at all.

The Office of Education is taking a number of actions designed to help American education implement the environmental challenge. For example --

-- We have determined to focus on and give high priority to environmental-ecological education in the program objectives of the Office for the 1970's.

-- A special Environmental Education Task Force has been established to see that all possible resources in the Office are focused on the environmental effort.

-- We plan to participate actively in Earth Day on April 22. As part of this National Teach-In celebration, members of the staff and I will take part in a Teach-In at one of our universities where we hope to engage in meaningful dialogue and interchange of ideas with students who have done so much to awaken the Nation to the environmental crisis. We are urging all educators throughout the Nation to concern themselves with this effort and to give this environmental event the attention it deserves.

-- We have proposed that teachers and administrators follow up the National Earth Day observance by organizing and planning regional Ecological-Environmental Teach-Ins for Teachers in the Summer of 1970.

-- We are calling a Summer conference for the purpose of planning future environmental education activities and programs.

-- We are cooperating with the National Park Service in an effort to increase the educational use of the rich cultural and natural environmental resources under the supervision of the Department of the Interior.

-- We have called upon State and local education agencies throughout the Nation to plan curricular and extra-curricular activities in environmental education. (Only yesterday, the Office received an imaginative plan from the New Jersey State Department of Education.)

-- We have begun planning for the United States participation in the 1972 UN International Environmental Year.

Before us stands a great challenge. Arnold Toynbee has told us that the essence of the story of mankind and the survival of civilizations is to be found in the cycle of challenge and response. Those that respond survive; those that do not decline and die.

I believe America contains the seeds of response. Some are disturbed by the enormity of the challenge -- but the very fact that we are willing and anxious to focus on our environmental problems is the best assurance that we do indeed still possess the energy to tackle them and the ability to forge the tools to conquer them.

In just six years, this Nation will enter upon its third century of independence. How our children and their children will live in that century -- or even if they will -- is almost totally dependent on the commitment we must now make and the dedication with which we carry it out.

If we are committed and steadfast, then we can in good time step aside and make room for the future, with the reassurance that we have

kept the faith . . . that in the brief but eloquent words of Ecclesiastes: "One generation passeth away and another generation cometh, but the Earth abideth forever."

With the third R -- 'Rithmetic -- we come, as the young might say, to the "nitty-gritty." A major focus of the present Federal concept of this R is on the President's Commission on School Finance.

I can see some lifted eyebrows at that "major focus" -- some who would cry "subterfuge" and say that 'Rithmetic in terms of Federal participation in education should be spelled MONEY -- and more, much more, of it. I do not disagree with this -- and indeed I am pledged to do everything within my power to see to it that our schools are adequately financed.

The present difficulty, of course, is that the current financial equation has to include the element of "inflation." When inflation is under control, I am sure there will be substantial increases in the support for education. In the meantime, the effort must be to advance the present priority of education so that more of the funds available to Government are allotted to education.

But at work also in the consideration of the financing of education -- and rightfully so -- are serious questions about the structure and patterns of finance and about accountability.

These questions are the motivation for the two most important items of the President's Message on Education Reform -- the first, the establishment of the President's Commission on School Finance; the second, the recommendation for the establishment of a National Institute of Education.

You are, I am sure, familiar with this message so I do not need to discuss these proposals in detail and would like only to emphasize their importance. It is difficult to know which to discuss first -- which is cart, which horse; which cause, which effect. In practice they cannot really be separated because it is essential to have a sound basis for ensuring the availability of adequate funds, equitably obtained, to support those education practices which we can demonstrate as deserving support -- or vice versa.

For tonight, I will place the Finance Commission first because it is a reality and is now being organized and staffed. As you know,

the President has named Mr. Neil McElroy as Chairman. The other members will be named soon and will include representatives from private and parochial schools.

This Commission will be looked upon, I believe, as both an historic and heroic step in American education. To face the gargantuan task of clarifying and simplifying the jumbled, haphazard arrangements -- the baffling and unsatisfactory long-accumulated results of piecemeal reform and partial remedies -- now operative in financing our schools requires courage. To accomplish the task will be to supply a foundation for the improvement of education that will make the work of this Commission a landmark in the development of our educational system.

The future of the parochial schools will be a specific assignment of the President's Commission -- and your participation and cooperation will be an essential part of the Commission's operation. These schools, the President states ". . . add a dimension of spiritual value, giving children a moral code by which to live. This Government cannot be indifferent to the potential collapse of such schools."

The National Institute of Education is as yet only a recommendation but I hope that Congress will act promptly to create this new agency. As you probably know, the Institute would be located in the Department of

Health, Education, and Welfare, under the Assistant Secretary for Education. Its purpose would be to begin the serious, systematic search for new knowledge needed to make educational opportunity truly equal.

A coherent approach to research and experimentation has long been needed and is essential if we are to be able to identify the most productive educational practices and to demonstrate their effectiveness. Such ability is the only logical basis for the change, the reform, the improvement that are needed in education -- and the surest hope of obtaining the increased support that will be necessary to achieve them.

These same two questions of patterns of finance and accountability have helped to determine also the major recommendations of the Presidential Message on Higher Education Reform.

This message emphasizes an expansion and revamping of student aid to channel more of the funds to low-income students. It seeks to make higher education suit the real needs of more students by encouraging and supporting new career-education programs in community colleges and technical institutes. Through the establishment of a National Foundation for Higher Education, it proposes to assist and reward those institutions which can demonstrate increased excellence, and innovation and reform.

I wish there were time to deal with both of these Presidential messages at greater length because I feel that they contain the seeds of a new growth in education that will be healthier, stronger than ever before, because it is more securely rooted in knowledge of the best and most effective practices in education and the most prudent and equitable ways of financing them.

But what I have said about the messages particularly, and more broadly about the different concept of the three R's, seems to indicate that change and reform in education are pointing toward a recasting of the entire educational enterprise in line with new perspectives on our national purposes.

The challenges fall on everyone from the President and the Congress through the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to every part of the vast complex of organizations and activities, public and private, that make up education in America.

Flexibility is the keynote to the kind of change coming. Heretofore, the changes we have sought have been largely within the existing educational structure. Now we seek a broader interpretation of education that discards rigid structuring for a freer adaptation to differing needs, timing, and goals -- an interpretation that encompasses the total life and environment of the young. In the future we can expect the school as we now know it to become a decreasing part of the emerging pattern of education in America.

This concept of change is in line with the basic idea of trying to produce educational opportunity that will indeed serve the individual.

That this kind of thinking is going on among Catholic educators is evident in this quotation from the book, "Catholic Education Faces Its Future," by Professor Neil McCluskey of Notre Dame.

"In its evolutionary path into the future, the Catholic school still has a vital role to play in American society. It will be boldly contemporary, educationally superlative, distinctively Christian, and increasingly ecumenical. It will be a bridge to 'further the dialogue between the church and the family of man to their mutual benefit.' Because of the Vatican II-inspired openness, it will no longer seem to be one of the hierarchical church's instruments of conquest, and though under church control, it will not necessarily be administered by it. Because it can then truly serve society, it will be supported by society."

Certainly the special problems you face are most difficult at this point and I hope to make it possible for the Office of Education to be of greater assistance to you. I have been considering how this might be accomplished and would welcome any suggestions you might have.

One effort we are making which will help you, and public school educators as well, is concerned with Title I of ESEA.

Late last Fall I named a Title I Task Force to examine this, the largest of the Federal programs, and asked it to make recommendations to me about changes that should be made in the program. To date the Task Force has come to me with a very strong recommendation on the

issue of comparability in the public schools, and I have accepted and acted upon their recommendation.

The non-public schools of the country are of great concern to this Task Force, and one of the eleven work groups into which it is divided is concentrating on the problems of this important part of the Nation's educational fabric. We know that disadvantaged children enrolled in these schools should be receiving under the Title I program treatment equal to that of such children in the public schools. Working with the various interest groups in the non-public school area, we have formulated a number of questions about how Title I funds are being used. For example, are the non-public schools of the large metropolitan areas receiving all the help from Title I to which they are entitled? We have some evidence which indicates that there are some allocation problems -- that some non-public school systems are receiving too much and others not enough.

In this difficult endeavor we have received the encouragement and assistance of the associations in Washington representing the non-public schools, and we look forward to a continuing close working relationship with them.

As we look ahead to this decade of change it must be realized anew that the only justification of change in education is the improvement of education -- not just in the narrow sense of classrooms, school books and teachers, but in the sense of education as an on-going process that begins with birth and ends only with death.

The size and complexity of education today -- phrases such as "American Education," "Education as a whole," can easily lead us into thinking of our profession as some sort of vague, machinistic entity whose operations are beyond anyone's control and whose scope is impossible to grasp. This is understandable but nonetheless a delusion. Education, no matter how complex its execution may become, remains primarily an interaction between human beings. It is the process whereby values and knowledge are transmitted from one person to another. Its impersonalization is a result of allowing ourselves to view our labors mostly in terms of measurable results. To measure is essential, but we are dealing with people not with things, and thus with many intangibles which have just as great, if not greater, importance than the results of achievement tests.

To give the students of our schools competence, the ability to function productively and satisfyingly in society is a necessary and worthy goal, but it must include also the instilling of the ideals of self-respect and respect for fellow men and the society they constitute.

This view of education gives continuing credence to the immemorial statement that education is our best hope for alleviating the many social problems facing our Nation -- and our world. Your emphasis on the global dimensions of education reflects so truly the human and spiritual elements of education that transcend national differences and boundaries.

The evils that beset mankind certainly do not recognize boundaries. St. Thomas Aquinas, as you know, defines evil as the absence of some positive good. It is the product of the vacuum created by the lack of something worthwhile. If this be so, if these evils are the result of a deficiency in society, it is our task as educators to provide something to fill that vacuum. It is our task to bring up and draw out the good in the world through the diffusion of true knowledge, through the inculcation of values.

I firmly believe that the social evils in our society today cannot be done away with by legislation or vast programs that are merely remedial. They cannot be eradicated by any executive "fiat" whether it be from Washington, from State Capitals, or from local agencies. They are problems that affect human beings not as societal statistics, but as members, each and every one, of society. The remedy and eradication of these problems can be most surely found in the full and total commitment on the part of education to their extinction.

Civil rights, for example, and all that this concept stands for does not constitute merely the absence of racial, ethnic or religious discrimination. Guaranteeing civil rights is not merely ensuring that people are not discriminated against. Rather, it is the full and free acceptance of human beings for what they are by other human beings. This is a question of a value judgment by one human being towards another. Legislation and other forms of decree can help to eliminate overt manifestations of prejudice, but it takes education to promote the understanding, the mutual respect and dignity that will eliminate it in the hearts of men.

It is this dimension of education that gives such urgency to the educator's unswerving efforts to promote true integration in our schools. No child whatever his race can be expected to learn or accept the fundamental values of American society when those values are openly denied in his own school or community. All educators throughout the Nation should not only persevere in their efforts to eliminate segregation in our schools, but to help the public to understand the values that are at issue, the harmful educational effects of segregation on all our people, and the necessity for its elimination if the public schools are to serve equally well all the people of America.

In these times of great social and political unrest, I ask you to examine your schools and the roles that they play with regard to the

communities of which they are a part. No longer can schools be isolated from the areas they serve. No longer can schools be just another segment of a student's life. No longer can teaching be just a way of earning a living. Our schools are vital instruments of our society and they must be an integral and driving force in the reform of our society's structure.

Thus, while change is perhaps the most characteristic element of education today, the basic purposes remain the same and must continue to govern our judgments as to the nature and direction of change.

I am well aware that change is easy to talk but sometimes hard to take -- hard to endure because of the manifold difficulties, the struggle of making change a reality in our educational system. But the need for change, for the improvement of our educational enterprise, both public and private, is so obvious that it cannot be ignored by any responsible, dedicated educator.

The choice is ours -- we can opt to entrench ourselves in the defensive justifications of lack of funds, lack of facilities or lack of manpower. Or, we can accept the necessity of change and channel our abilities, the forces of public opinion, new methods and ideas, the whole new array of technical aids, into a revitalization of education that will be felt in every school, in the education of every child, everywhere.

The three R's, Federal style, 1970, as I have interpreted them, represent an attempt to provide leadership in effecting constructive change. I hope that you who are concerned with the education of more than five million of the forty-five million school children of our Nation will give your support to this interpretation -- so that together we shall achieve that fourth all important R -- RESULTS!

Education is being criticized, challenged -- it is a difficult period for our schools -- but the only acceptable response of the conscientious educator, whether in public or private schools, is a renewal of commitment to the unchanging task of improving the educational opportunity of every boy and every girl in this Nation.